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Subject: Hargett's Final Post to the CF / LCNP Social Media - 01 January 2021 - SCDHEC Team - et al.

SCDHEC Friends

This (below) is my final post to the LCNP / CF social media world, 01 Jan 2021.

What our community has accomplished with the creation of what is today Lake Conestee Nature Preserve is nothing short of remarkable. (An accounting follows below).

We could not have achieved all of this without help from our SCDHEC friends. All made possible because Gail and Keith and Angela came up to walk the Lake Conestee site, and embraced my crazy idea.

And, there is much more to do, especially with respect to the long-term care of the Lake Conestee Site, the rehabilitation/replacement of the Lake Conestee Dam that holds it all together, and protection of the Reedy River.

I've not quite gotten all of that done, although I have exhaustively tried.

Still, the table is set, the stars are aligned, and I'm confident that one way or another, responsible leaders in the community will eventually grasp the need to follow through, thoroughly and completely, to seize that opportunity.

We'll talk soon! Since I've been so ridiculously under-employed for the last ten years, I've gotta hurry up and get a job, and get some unfinished business taken care of!

Very best wishes for a brighter and happier 2021 !!!

Dave

Lake Conestee Nature Preserve / Conestee Foundation, Inc.

Thank You, Dear CF/LCNP Staff, Volunteers, Board, Partners, Preserve Patrons, and Financial Supporters !!!!!

This is a community of friends supporting a little non-profit charitable conservation organization bringing to reality a Really Big Idea!

Yesterday, 31 December 2020, I wrapped up my "tenure" of over 10-years as the Executive Director, technical consultant, chief chainsaw guy, tractor-driver, and dam-man at Conestee Foundation and Lake Conestee Nature Preserve. *(And to show for it, I have a broken nose, lots of*

scars, several good emergency room friends (including Bill Bridges' daughter, Dr. Page Bridges), several 6-10 sting yellow-jacket experiences, and abundant knicks, scratches, and knocks on the head, some memorable falls and collisions, and lots of 'near misses' I didn't tell anyone about).

That said, this is my final post to the Lake Conestee Nature Park / Conestee Foundation social media.

My good friend Dana Leavitt and I started talking about Lake Conestee back in 1995, and after five years of lining up countless ducks, we created the Conestee Foundation and acquired historic Lake Conestee. It was in 2000, over 20 years ago now, that I submitted the incorporation papers to the Secretary of State. The tiny Conestee Foundation, dedicated to turning Greenville's "cesspool" into something good for the community and for the Reedy River, was thus launched.

After several years of rigorous assessment of contamination conditions in Lake Conestee, all in close collaboration with SCDHEC, we finally got to the point of opening a very modest little nature park, with just a couple of trails. That ribbon cutting on a rainy afternoon in October 2006 has grown into what has become Lake Conestee Nature Preserve.

I've been blessed to be involved continuously from before the beginning of the Lake Conestee project. This has been an extraordinary journey, one that is not over.

We were certifiably crazy, starting with no resources, and an abandoned, forlorn, and forgotten industrial reservoir of 150 acres, filled with the untold chemical history of Greenville's industrialization. No sane person would go near it, and many would not utter its name.

What has evolved is a one-of-kind project nationally, an award-winning transformation of that pond, Lake Conestee, into an amazingly diverse state-sanctioned Wildlife Sanctuary, an Important Bird Area of Global Significance, Audubon partner, and National Phoenix Prize first-runnerup. And, our original tract, the Lake Conestee parcel, and the historic Lake Conestee Dam are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the last ten years:

- We've gone from fewer than 20,000 visitors to roughly 120,000, or perhaps 150,000 or more per year.
- In that time we've gone from 5 miles of trails to 14 miles, including trails on the properties of our partners, City of Greenville, and ReWa, and from 2 wildlife observation decks to 11.
- From a few hundred volunteer hours to well over 3,000 hours per year.
- We've partnered with GE on HOG Day projects for nine years, performing 20-25 projects each year, with over 25,000 cumulative volunteer hours from HOG-Day activities.

- We've planted dozens of acres of trees, thousands total, of diverse native species, and eradicated tens of thousands of stems of non-native species.
- We've installed several dozen picnic tables, benches, and numerous teaching areas.
- We've designed and built 40 self-guided learning stations, teaching the natural history, watershed lessons, the importance of our riparian lands and floodplains to healthy rivers, and the human history of our lands.
- We've built over a mile of wetland boardwalks and bogwalks, more than any local, state, or federal park in SC.
- Our phenomenal birding community has helped us go from a basic listing of birdlife to now 223 species, more than any other site in the Upstate.
- We've gone from 2 staff to 6 (nearly full time) staff, plus three more part-time maintenance staff.
- LCNP has more handicapped-accessible trails than any state park in SC, over six miles.
- We have a robust, mature nature and environmental education program led by wonderful professionals.
- We now have tens of thousands of kids, pre-K to college students, coming to our Preserve each year to learn through professionally-led and self-guided programs, about nature, watershed science, wildlife, and the unique stewardship story of Lake Conestee and the Reedy River, and to bathe in the amazing benefits of being outdoors.
- All of this is protected by a Conservation Easement with Upstate Forever, arguably the most "impactful" easement property in UF's portfolio.
- With the annexation of our Preserve into the City of Greenville last year, the City literally doubled the amount of park & preserve space in the City.
- LCNPreserve is the largest riverfront landowner along the Reedy River in Greenville County, and the largest contiguous

forestland/wetland complex in the upper/middle Reedy River watershed.

- We have created a genuine eco-tourism attraction, providing valuable ecosystem services to the greater Greenville community.
- With all of this, our Preserve is the "Wildest Place in Greenville," with remarkable wildlife diversity, a protected preserve for wildlife, and a sanctuary for all of us.

What lies beneath all of this is a very large, complicated, and serious contaminated site, that will require perpetual care. No worries, as we have worked very closely with SCDHEC and USEPA to assess the Site, evaluate conditions and hazards, and make sure our use of the LC Site is safe for our patrons. Work continues on those challenges and on the historic Lake Conestee Dam (*now 129 years old*), so the CF/LCNP team will continue that work going forward. I will help to the extent I can. While building a remarkable nature preserve, we've stayed on top of all of that, to understand the Site, and determine how to best manage it, and keep it safe for our use, and for wildlife. Stay tuned, and just follow the rules --- they are in place to protect you.

I am extremely proud of all that we have all accomplished together with the "no-man's-land" that was "Lake Co-nasty" 50 years ago. We have wonderful partners, and have been blessed with numerous grants from private and public parties and agencies alike. We have created a genuine eco-tourism attraction, providing valuable ecosystem services and unequaled "green infrastructure" to the greater Greenville community.

We have many contributors, but if we are to sustain this wild place as a 'fee-free' preserve, accessible to all, we need everyone to step up to a much higher level of support.

I have absolute confidence in the team that we have assembled to care for, protect, and love the Preserve, deliver our education and conservation programs, and to manage the Foundation's business affairs. Our new Executive Director, Michael Corley, is enormously capable, and conservation values come naturally to him.

So with that report, I sign off, and leave Lake Conestee Nature Preserve in the good hands of a dedicated team of conservationists and educators.

I thank you all for all that you have done to help us reclaim, restore, and repurpose this remarkable place, and complete its transformation into a beloved community asset. Moreover, I thank you for all you will do going forward to help sustain the Preserve, and with the hard everyday work critical to its stewardship and protection.

Yours in conservation,
Dave

Please Note: As of 01 January 2021 I am no longer serving as Executive Director of Conestee Foundation, Inc.

Dave Hargett, Ph.D.

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